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ABSTRACT

The use of authentic materials for an advanced French course for students of journalism and communication has the drawback that authentic French sources assume a regular, informed readership sharing the same culture and history. A solution found at Ohio University is to use a publication that bridges the two cultures, such as the "Journal francais d'Amerique" ("French Journal of America"). Once students become familiar with a topic, they can advance to more challenging and in-depth accounts found in French publications, reading the corresponding accounts of one issue given in several publications. Students may also study videotapes in class and in the language laboratory. Timely and authentic video materials are obtained most easily via satellite transmission, but other video materials are available through journalism programs and publishers. Materials chosen should be thematically challenging and linguistically feasible. In selecting video recordings, special attention should be paid to visual and sound track quality. Students should be prepared for exposure to varying accents, idioms, and vocabulary. In all cases, the success of materials selection depends on adequate preparation through pre-reading exercises, vocabulary preview, grammar review, and cultural allusions. Closure also requires adequate time, and may include student interviews with an expert and group presentations. (MSE)

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FRENCH FOR JOURNALISTS:

CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES

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French for Journalists: Classroom Techniques

Herta Rodina

An advanced French language course can meet the specific needs of students of journalism and communication, while at the same time reviewing grammar and developing skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening comprehension. One of the best approaches, I believe, uses authentic material, both in print and on video.

Ohio University provides a journalism track for students of French and Spanish at the intermediate (second-year) and advanced (third-year) levels.[1] At the advanced level, to which I will confine my remarks, students have acquired sufficient skill in the language to deal with a variety of examples of authentic print journalism from France. While reading selections from major dailies and weeklies such as le Monde, le Figaro, Libération, l'Humanité, l'Express, le Nouvel Observateur, and le Point, students learn about the history, politics, and readership of these publications. Instead of being told that French

newspapers tend to be more politicized than US newspapers, they experience the biases first-hand.

However, one of the recurring problems of using authentic materials is the incompleteness of the experience. The students are not French, nor are they in France. Authentic French sources naturally assume a regular, informed readership sharing the same culture and history.

One solution is to enlist the help of a publication that already bridges the two cultures. In 1988, our advanced course followed the French Presidential election. After a brief overview of the French political system, students began studying the major issues, as well as the various parties and candidates. Very often, the Journal français d'Amérique served as a good introduction to a new topic; because of its overtly pedagogical slant, it provided the background that was most often missing from French papers. Also, the simple, clear language of the Journal français d'Amérique enabled students to assimilate large quantities of information relatively fast. The daily reading assignments dealt with four issues -- immigration and racism, AIDS, France's relationship with the Middle East, and privatization. Approximately two weeks were devoted to each issue.

Once the students became familiar with a topic, we were able to advance to the more challenging and in-depth accounts found in le Monde, Le Point, or l'Express. We would study the same story in four or five different publications, each representing a

different political position. With this technique, students acquired a sense of the 'ideal reader' each journal was writing for, as well as the role each played in the political process. By the end of the quarter, many students were able to identify the source of an article before it was provided by having recognized the general political stance of a given publication, the recurring buzz words found in it, its preference for certain images or allusions, even the style of individual journalists.

The advanced course also relies on video. Students study videotexts during individual, self-paced, weekly sessions in the language lab, and less frequently, watch videos in class. The videos assigned as individual study are usually a fifteen-to-twenty-minute excerpt from French television on the same topic as the reading assignments. In this way, one medium reinforces and complements the other. For example, we studied articles about Harlem Désir and his anti-racism program concurrently with clips of a television appearance, as well as accounts of that appearance on television news. The same was done for the code de la nationalité debate, discussions about AIDS, the freeing of the hostages, and so forth.

Timely and authentic video material can be obtained most easily via satellite transmission. If you have access to satellite programming, the University of Maryland - Baltimore provides France-TV Magazine, a monthly selection of television from France, and live television broadcasts originate from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's French-language station in

Montreal. The latter has been particularly useful when studying francophone media and francophone issues. This past winter, for instance, we were able to study the renewed controversy over Bill 101, Quebec's official language law. We watched the story unfold from the announcement of the Supreme Court's decision on its constitutionality, through the demonstrations in Montreal, to Premier Bourassa's eventual compromise. We were able to compare accounts from French-Canadian television and newspapers with those in the English-Canadian media, even with accounts in the French media.

While an asset, satellite transmission is not essential for the success of a French-for-journalists program. PICS -- the Project for International Communication Studies at the University of Iowa -- compiles authentic video material organized around specific themes, such as Arab women in France, inner-city youth, the French presidency, various francophone countries, and French perceptions of American television, to name only a few. Pedagogical aids accompany many of these videotexts. Jem Communications publishes <u>France Panorama</u>, a biweekly French video magazine composed of current events, general interest stories, and commercials from Antenne 2. Each installment includes a User's Guide containing background information, vocabulary, content questions, and pedagogical tips. Because they bypass the need to sift through hours of material taped from satellite, <u>PICS</u> and <u>France Panorama</u> are particularly useful for instructors whose preparation time is limited.

In addition, Purdue University has developed the French for Africa Video Interview Series. Although these are not videos from television and although the authors seem oblivious to the visual nature of the medium (the interviews are just that -- two people sitting in a chair self-consciously asking and answering questions), the series can serve as good background, especially since authentic African television is difficult and/or costly to obtain. Numerous francophone African countries are represented and interesting, insightful information is provided. Additional sources of authentic video suitable for advanced language classes are listed in Appendix A.

From this wealth of sources, the instructor of a French-for-journalists course has to make selections that are both thematically challenging and linguistically feasible. In an attempt to identify the major problem areas and to simplify the decision process, I have drawn up a set of guidelines for the selection of newspaper and magazine articles. These guidelines are found in Appendix B.

These criteria for the selection of articles can be applied, with some modifications, to the selection of workable television clips. However, with video, special attention should be given to the visual quality of the image, as well as to the clarity of the sound track. A blurry, off-color picture affects comprehension as much, if not more, than a garbled or weak sound track. Very often sound quality is affected by the transmission and/or reproduction of on-location footage, where background noise can

overwhelm a non-native listener. Keep in mind that the quality of the video will deteriorate in proportion to levels of reproduction or transmission -- satellite reception varies in quality, even if the original broadcast is clear, and temporary student copies will never be as clear as the original, especially if old cassettes are re-used for taping new programs.

Authentic television programming exposes a student to regional accents, and the resulting difficulty should be carefully considered. Students accustomed to hearing standard French need to be prepared not only for various accents within France, but also for idioms and vocabulary characteristic of Quebec, Caribbean, and African French.

In every case, the success of the selection depends on adequate preparation. Students must be provided with pre-reading (or in the case of video, pre-viewing) exercises to introduce the linguistic and/or cultural content of the texts. Unfamiliar vocabulary should be presented in class before students receive the assignment, either on the board as part of a general introduction to the material, or as a handout or a gloss in the text itself, if the new vocabulary is especially difficult or extensive. As for grammatical problems, often a quick review of the passé simple will suffice; at other times, students' attention will need to be drawn to recurring unfamiliar structures -- the use of the passive voice, for instance, or the presence of unexpected indirect object pronouns.

Cultural allusions are the most difficult to prepare. For

newspaper articles, I provide students with a cultural glossary. In the case of the presidential election, the articles repeatedly referred to such disparate items as la douce France, Descartes' cogito, Pétain, de Gaulle, Babar the elephant, and Du Bellay. This past winter, students studying the francophone press needed a cultural glossary for references to la belle province, la revanche des berceaux, and le temps béni des colonies, to name only a few.

Pre-viewing strategies for video can include showing a short excerpt of the assigned videotext, so that the instructor can clarify the context, and students can recognize significant individuals and accents, and be aware of the format (an on-site interview, a studio interview, a panel discussion, a poll, a narrative, etc.). Students can be provided with a worksheet to guide their viewing and prepare them for class discussion. Depending on the course's goals, useful items for a worksheet can include vocabulary-building exercises, grammar recognition exercises, and spot translation for recurring regional or slang expressions. The worksheet can contain relatively simple content questions to ensure comprehension, followed by interpretive questions to help them understand the significance of the videotext. Linguistic difficulty need not rule out meaningful analysis. For example, when students were assigned to view Mitterrand's 1988 New Year's address, highly specific content questions allowed them to uncover on their own the subtext of the speech. In this case, the speech was based on the motto Liberté,

égalité, fraternité, but it suppressed explicit mention of égalité. By noticing this rhetorical manoeuver, students were able to react to the speech as active critics within the larger context of France's nationality debate and upcoming election.

After individual viewing, discussion can be enhanced by using video in the classroom to point out items students might have missed. Gestures can be highlighted by replaying a short sequence without the sound track; accents can be highlighted by replaying the sound track without the image; visual details that occur too fast in the real time of the broadcast can be studied by freezing the video on a specific frame or advancing in slow motion. The coverage of the demonstrations in Montreal this past December provided a quick overview of the crowd displaying a multitude of pro-Bill 101 and anti-Bourassa slogans. By using the slow-motion and freeze-frame options students were able to read and interpret the various messages.

In the same way that a topic requires introduction time, it also requires time for adequate closure. Knowing when to stop is the first step; no matter how fascinating a topic might be, it cannot command attention indefinitely. My experience has indicated that eight to ten contact hours is optimum. Then, one of the best follow-up activities is to invite an expert to the class for students to interview in French. This year we were fortunate enough to interview a French-speaking correspondent for a major Canadian daily right after students had finished examining Quebec. If funds are unavailable to invite a foreign

professional, international francophone graduate students are usually very eager to visit classes free of charge. In the past, advanced classes have been able to interview individuals from Burkina-Faso, Zaïre, Morocco, and Mali. Student reaction to guests is highly positive -- in many cases it is the first time that they are able to use their French for real communication with a native francophone.

Group presentations are another useful follow-up tool. Last winter, five groups of students each conducted in-depth research on a presidential candidate. Their study culminated in a thirty-minute presentation to their classmates at the end of the quarter, followed by a mock election. This winter, groups of students chose a francophone country not covered in class and prepared a presentation on significant current events in their country based on reports in the major French-language dailies and weeklies.

After all the authentic sources are used, and used well, it will still be true that the best classroom for French is France. However, with some care, print and video can import a valuable part of that world.

Appendix A

SOURCES OF FRENCH-LANGUAGE PRINT JOURNALISM

NEWSPAPERS:
- Le Monde
- Le Figaro
- Libération
- L'Humanité
- La Croix
- Le Canard enchaîné
- Le Devoir [Canada]
- Le Soleil [Canada]
- Le Journal Français d'Amérique [USA, biweekly]

MAGAZINES:
- L'Express
- Le Point
- Le nouvel observateur
- L'Actualité [Canada, monthly]

SOURCES OF FRENCH-LANGUAGE TELEVISION PROGRAMS

VIA SATELLITE: France-TV Magazine -- programming from Antenne 2 through University of Maryland - Baltimore, transcript downloadable through Bitnet.

SCOLA -- (Satellite Communications for Learning), 2500 California Street, Omaha, Nebraska 68178-0778, tel.402 280-4063.

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation / Radio-Canada (live from Montreal).

COMMERCIAL DISTRIBUTORS: PICS -- (Project for International Communication Studies), 266 International Center, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242, tel.319 335-2335.

France Panorama -- programming from Antenne 2 compiled by Jem Communications, 49 W. 38th Sreet, Suite 1500, New York, NY 10018.

"Apostrophes" -- copies available from Jem Communications.

La Télé des Français -- six hours of "evergreen" programming, including game shows, documentaries, entertainment, cooking, etc, available from Middlebury College Language Schools, Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT 05753.

National Film Board of Canada / Office national du film du Canada -- a good source of documentaries for rent on a wide variety of topics, 1251 Avenue of the Americas, 16th Floor, New York, NY 10020, tel.212 586-5131.

French for Africa Video Interview Series -- four albums, 14 interviews in total, can be used to supplement a study of francophone Africa as presented in the French press, produced by Susan E. MacKay, Language Training Coordinator, International Programs in Agriculture & Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907.

Appendix B

GUIDELINES FOR THE SELECTION OF NEWSPAPER AND MAGAZINE ARTICLES

GENERAL SUBJECT: (international politics, national politics, ecology, medicine, social problems, etc.)

SPECIFIC SUBJECT: (release of hostages in Lebanon, RU-486 abortion pill, independence for New Caledonia, separatist demonstration in Montreal, etc.)

FORMAT: (interview, poll, narrative, transcribed speech, etc.)

TITLE:

SOURCE:

DATE:

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY: (first-quarter intermediate, third-quarter advanced, etc.)

Lower score = less difficult Higher score = more difficult

LINGUISTIC CRITERIA

1. Does the article contain a lot of technical vocabulary?

   NOT AT ALL 1 2 3 4 5 DEFINITELY

2. Is the syntax difficult?

   NOT AT ALL 1 2 3 4 5 DEFINITELY

3. Does the article contain a lot of unexplained acronyms?

   NOT AT ALL 1 2 3 4 5 DEFINITELY

4. Does the article contain a lot of unmodified proper nouns (people, places, companies, etc.)?

NOT AT ALL 1 2 3 4 5 DEFINITELY

5. Does the article contain a lot of unfamiliar slang?

NOT AT ALL 1 2 3 4 5 DEFINITELY

6. Does the article contain a lot of exposition, unrelieved by quotes or photographs?

NOT AT ALL 1 2 3 4 5 DEFINITELY

CULTURAL CRITERIA

7. Does the article assume the reader has kept up with the story's developments or has prior knowledge of the issue?

NOT AT ALL 1 2 3 4 5 DEFINITELY

8. Does the article contain a lot of cultural references that an average student would not understand?

NOT AT ALL 1 2 3 4 5 DEFINITELY

9. Does the subject matter exclude cross-cultural observations and comparisons?

NOT AT ALL 1 2 3 4 5 DEFINITELY

PEDAGOGICAL CRITERIA

10. Is the article too long to be assigned as one night's homework?

NOT AT ALL 1 2 3 4 5 DEFINITELY

11. Will the quality of the reproduction affect readability?

NOT AT ALL 1 2 3 4 5 DEFINITELY

12. Will the subject matter bore an average student?

NOT AT ALL 1 2 3 4 5 DEFINITELY

13. Is this article isolated in content from other articles already studied?

NOT AT ALL 1 2 3 4 5 DEFINITELY

14. Is this article difficult to relate to material students will be studying later in the course?

NOT AT ALL 1 2 3 4 5 DEFINITELY

15. Will this article become dated quickly, making the possibility of future use unlikely?

NOT AT ALL 1 2 3 4 5 DEFINITELY

Notes

[1] For further information on the journalism sequence, see the following articles by my colleague Lois Vines: 1) "French Media Courses for Journalism and Communications," Modern Technology in Foreign Language Education, Ed. Wm. Flint Smith (Lincolnwood, Ill.: National Textbook Company, 1988) 193-199; and 2) "Foreign Language Courses for Journalism and Communication Majors," ADFL Bulletin 20.2 (Jan. 1989): 64-69.

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